

SPIRITUAL HEART DISEASE

My Dad was a terrific athlete for most of his life. In his youth, he was a high school football and basketball star. After high school, he joined the YMCA and played handball and basketball. He learned to box and was active in boxing in the Army. Dad remained athletically active into old age. When my brother and I were young, we were always playing wiffle ball and football in the back yard with our Father. We golfed and played tennis together. My brother and I were always impressed with Dad's strength, vitality and endurance.

In the late 1970s Dad and I took up racquetball and played for many years. Although he was thirty years older than I, it was difficult for me to win against him, even when he was in his sixties. One night in 1980, when Dad was sixty-two, he had a heart attack while we were playing racquetball. Because of his excellent physical conditioning, Dad survived that heart attack and several others, but he finally succumbed to heart disease in August 2001 at the advanced age of eighty-three.

If you are an American, chances are good that it is coronary heart disease that will end your life. It is the number one killer in the United States. We should all be concerned about the condition of the muscular pump in our chest that keeps us alive. There is, however, another, more serious kind of heart disease that we should be aware of and concerned about. The purpose of this article is to advise you of the nature of this disease, to help you diagnose it and to show how it must be treated.

You won't find mention of this ailment in a medical journal. The AMA knows nothing about it. Your doctor can't detect or treat it. The book that describes this malady is the Bible. It is much more common and deadly than coronary heart disease. It must be diagnosed and treated, for if it is not treated, it can end the Christian's hope of eternal life. The disease itself is referred to as "Hardness of Heart".

We must first understand that when the Bible refers to the heart, it is usually using the figure of speech, metonymy, to indicate the seat of emotion and intellect, the innermost nature of a man, and not referring to the organ itself. This is explained by the Wycliff Bible Encyclopedia in its article about the heart:

"The heart was considered by the Egyptians to be the central organ of physical life. Since the Hebrews likewise held this opinion instead of taking the liver as the principal internal organ as all Mesopotamian people did, here is undesigned evidence of the long stay of the Israelites in Egypt. Thus the word "heart" in both Heb. and Gr. came to mean that which is central. It is the seat of physical, mental, and spiritual life. It is seldom used of things, but when so used, it is in the sense of midst (Exo 15:8). Only rarely is "heart" used of the physical organ (2Sa 18:4; 2Ki 9:24)."

If Israel had spent hundreds of years in slavery in Assyria instead of Egypt, David would have been a man after God's own liver, lovers would carve their initials inside a liver, and "Crazy On You" would have been not have been written by a rock band named "Heart". But the western world, influenced by the Hebrew writings of the Bible ascribe the intellect, emotions, mind and soul of humans to arise from the condition of their hearts, not their livers.

God has much to say about the human heart and the diseased state characterized by its hardening. Lets look at the quintessential example of hardness of heart, the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

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*EXO 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: **but I will harden his heart**, that he shall not let the people go.*

Pharaoh's heart was pretty hard. In the Exodus account it says eleven times that God hardened his heart. It says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart three times, and five times it simply says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. I don't want to focus on who did the hardening, but rather, what was the effect of this condition on Pharaoh.

Today, we use the expression, "hard-hearted" to describe a person who cannot be touched by compassion, pity or mercy. The Biblical meaning is quite different and we must keep this in mind as we study what the Bible has to say about it. When the Old Testament talks about hardness of heart, the Hebrew means "slow or thick". As one studies all the scriptures about hardness of heart, the meaning becomes clear: Hardness of heart is the spiritual condition characterized by these attributes:

- ❑ It is insensitivity to the spiritual aspect of life.
- ❑ It is insensitivity to the potential of spirit involvement in the physical realm.
- ❑ It is the failure to "consider" the spiritual as well as the physical.
- ❑ It is "Spiritual Stupidity" (Hebrew, Kabed = heavy, slow, thick).
- ❑ It is related to unbelief.
- ❑ It is the inability to see God's interaction or connection with a process or event.
- ❑ It is the inability to process mentally the spiritual component of our experiences.
- ❑ It is a spiritual disease which can and does affect Christians.

We can see the result of this "spiritual stupidity" in Pharaoh's inability to grasp what was happening around him:

EXO 10:7 And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

Because his heart was hardened, Pharaoh could not perceive that which was perfectly clear to everyone else. He was unable to process mentally the miraculous events that were destroying his kingdom. He could not discern this to be the work of God, although those in his court had done so:

EXO 8:19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

The inability to perceive the presence and protection of God toward Israel was ultimately the death of Pharaoh and his army.

*EXO 14:8 **And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh** king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. 9 But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.*

*EXO 14:17 **And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians**, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the*

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*LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. 19 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20 And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. 21 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, 25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: **so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.***

Pharaoh and his army died because of their hardness of heart. They must have been suffering a spiritual "Duh" moment when they followed the pillar of fire down onto the seabed. Their hearts softened, but not in time to save them from the collapse of the standing waters that towered above them.

Sadly, the Israelites who benefited from Pharaoh's hardness of heart suffered from the same disease. They were unable to process spiritually the meaning of their escape from captivity and the divine protection they enjoyed during their trek through the Sinai desert. The author of Hebrews points to their hardness of heart and warns us that we can contract the disease too:

*HEB 3:7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, 8 **Harden not your hearts,** as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.*

There are four warnings in Hebrews to Christians about hardness of heart.

HEB 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

In Hebrews 3:12, we see that hardness of heart can be caused by sin. Habitually sinning cause us to become inured to the spiritual component of life. We lose spiritual perception and become insensitive to the leading of the holy spirit. This scripture tells us that hardness of heart is connected to unbelief. Heb 3:15-19 reinforces these principles and goes on to point out that hardness of heart cause the Israelites to be denied entrance into the Promised Land. The implication is that hardness of heart and unbelief can keep us out of the Kingdom of God.

HEB 3:15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18 And

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to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

HEB 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The final warning is in Hebrews 4:

*HEB 4:6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, **harden not your hearts.***

Clearly, this is a disease that was not eradicated when the new covenant arrived. It is a continuing risk for today's Christian.

Examples of hardness of heart in the New Testament indicate that its symptoms include the inability to hear, see, remember and draw correct conclusions about our experiences as they relate to the spirit realm. The disciples suffered from it:

*MAT 14:15 And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. 16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; **give ye them to eat.***

Christ never made a frivolous or pointless statement. I believe He expected the disciples to be able to provide a meal for these people.

MAT 14:17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

They were missing the point. Christ must have given them some kind of training or information that they could have used to produce food miraculously. They tried to solve the problem using physical resources only. Christ did not press the point home, having perceived that the disciples were not going to understand:

MAT 14:18 He said, Bring them hither to me. 19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 20 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. 21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

Jesus gave them another chance, but they still were not getting it:

MAT 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. 33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? 34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. 35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples

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to the multitude. 37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

Continuing the same story in the Gospel according to Mark:

MAR 6:45 And straightway **he constrained his disciples** to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. 46 And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. 47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. 48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. 49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: 50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. 51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. **52 For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.**

Jesus had to force the disciples to get into the boat. Many of them were experienced fishermen and they knew that a storm was coming. They were reluctant to go out on a shallow body of water in high winds, knowing that this combination would create monstrous waves that could swamp a small boat. Jesus intentionally put them in a situation requiring them to exercise faith. One would think that their faith would have been great, having witnessed the miraculous feeding of the four thousand and the five thousand within a few days. Their faith was blocked by their hardness of heart and they were perplexed by this additional miracle.

Verse 52 says that they had not “considered” the miracles of the loaves. The meaning of the Greek is that they had not put it together mentally. They had not meditated on the miraculous events they had seen. They had not perceived the importance of the miracles. They had not dwelt on the ramifications of what had happened. They had not perceived the spiritual implications. Somehow, it just did not sink in. They had not **“put it together”**.

Their spiritual obtuseness caused them more problems later. In Mark 8, Christ is giving them an admonition to avoid the sins of the Pharisees and of Herod. Christ uses the symbol of leaven to refer to sin.

MAR 8:15 And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. 16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. 17 And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? **have ye your heart yet hardened?**

Jesus was dismayed that the disciples were worried about bread. They were unable to process the meaning of the spiritual analogy He was making. Didn't they know by now that He could have provided bread miraculously? He asked if they had hardened their hearts. The disciples had forgotten the miracles Jesus performed in feeding the multitudes. They were thinking in the physical realm and were not understanding the spiritual principles. Their hardness was preventing them from properly analyzing their experiences.

MAR 8:18 **Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?** 19 When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many

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baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. 20 And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. 21 And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

Clearly, this was a spiritual Duu-uh moment for the twelve. It took the disciples a long time to overcome their spiritual dullness. They took much criticism from Christ for this failing. He expected them to be sharper.

*MAR 16:9 Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. 10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. 14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, **and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart**, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*

Jesus was generally patient with sinning humans. One thing that infuriated Him was hypocrisy. Another human characteristic that angered Him was hardness of heart. In verse 14, above, Christ chided, criticized and reproached the disciples for unbelief and hardness of heart, which He felt they should have overcome by this juncture.

We can all identify with the problem the disciples were having. Hardness of heart is the condition of the natural man. Hardness of heart is the carnal response to an encounter with the spiritual realm or spiritual principles. The natural mind is spiritually obtuse. It is incapable of spiritual perception and thought. Paul discussed this in 1 Corinthians:

*1CO 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 **But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.***

Christ reproved the disciples for spiritual dullness. Would he reprove us as well? Have we ever had a spiritual coronary? Have we ever been spiritually dull? Have we ever suffered from unbelief or lack of faith? Have we ever been oblivious to the spiritual overtones of events around us? Its likely that every Christian suffers this disease from time to time.

We see that one cause for hardness of heart is the lack of the holy spirit working in the mind. Another we have discussed is sin and the failure to repent. The proverbs tell us that a lack of respect for God can cause it too:

PRO 28:14 Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

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We might interpret this to include the failure to take God seriously or failure to take Him at His word or believe His word. The disciples had hardness of heart when they failed to consider, to meditate on, to analyze, to put together the miraculous things they witnessed. These are the causes of spiritual heart disease.

Here is a list of the symptoms of spiritual heart disease:

- ❑ Blocked faith
- ❑ Fear
- ❑ Inability to understand spiritual principles or events
- ❑ Exclusive focus on the physical realm. Looking only for physical solutions
- ❑ Unbelief, Inability to see God
- ❑ Inability to believe in and trust the word of God

Here is the prescription. We need to be involved in activities that increase our spiritual perception and understanding. First, we must have an active prayer life. We must be in communication with God, asking Him for the spirit of understanding. We must have our natural minds enhanced by the spirit of God as was pointed out in 2Cor 2, above. God will give His spirit to those who come to Him in prayer and ask for it (see Mat 7:11).

Next, we need to study God's word. We must be familiar with spiritual concepts and principles. We must read and understand about God's power and abilities. We must be sure that He does exist in a spiritual reality that cannot be perceived by man's sensory apparatus. Our faith must be strengthened by immersion in the scriptures (Rom 10:17). We must read about what God has done in the past in order to be sensitive to and aware of what He is doing now. We need to take God's word more literally, in the places where it means to be taken literally. We need to know and believe God's many promises to us.

Occasionally, we must fast in order to draw close to God and to draw back from the physical realm. The things we can perceive are more convincing to us that the spiritual realm which has no impact on our sight, hearing and sense of touch. The purpose of fasting is to focus our minds on the spiritual realm, while abstaining for a short time from the physical things that consume so much of our attention.

We must be able to process the things we have experienced and the things we have learned in terms of spiritual knowledge and principles. We must evaluate the events of our lives and extract spiritual lessons. We must be able to see the intervention of God in our lives as He gives us blessings, knowledge, insight and correction. We must not forget these miracles, as the disciples forgot. We must remember what God has done for us. The mental and spiritual analysis of this data and information is called meditation. In the meditation process, we "put together" the events of our lives, integrating them with what we know about God and how He works with us. If we put it together correctly, we will not be dull or blind to the spiritual world that is active around us.

We must ask God for spiritual perception to help us to "put it together". We must also ask for a heart that can be touched by repentance. A heart hardened by sin cannot be broken.

PSA 51:16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

This heart softened and broken by repentance is a gift from God:

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*ROM 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 But after thy **hardness and impenitent heart** treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;*

If we want to have faith, if we want to have living belief, if we want to be able to perceive God, if we want to understand the spiritual import of the events of our lives, we must have pure hearts, not hardened ones:

MAT 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Everyone must periodically have a physical exam to determine the state of his physical health. Every Christian must have a spiritual self-exam to determine if spiritual hardening of the heart is a threat. If you have the symptoms, take the cure!